



## **Filologické vědy**

UDC 81'44

### **SOCIETY DIDCOURSE: SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE VARIABILITY**

**T. F. Arzhanikh**

*Candidate of Historical Sciences,  
professor assistant,*

**A. N. Smirnova**

*Candidate of Philological Sciences,  
professor assistant,  
Russian Economic University  
named after G. V. Plekhanov,  
Ivanovo branch, Russia*

---

**Summary.** Language is a social-cultural-geographical phenomenon. There is a deep relationship between language and society. It is in society that man acquires and uses language. When we study a language which is an abstraction of abstractions, a system of systems, we have to study its further abstractions such as dialects, sociolects, idiolects, etc. That is why we have to keep in mind the geographical area in which this language is spoken, the culture and the society in which it is used, the speakers who use it, the listeners for whom it is used, and the purpose for which it is used, besides the linguistic components that compose it. Only then can our study of a language be complete and comprehensive.

**Keywords:** language; sociology; sociolinguistics; culture; society.

---

Socio-linguistics is the study of speech functions according to the speaker, the hearer, their relationship and contact, the context and the situation, the topic of discourse, the purpose of discourse, and the form of discourse. An informal definition of socio-linguistics suggested by a linguist is that it is the study of: “*Who can say what how, using what means, to whom and why*”. It studies the causes and consequences of linguistic behavior in human societies; it is concerned with the function of language, and studies language from without.

The study of language as part of culture and society has now commonly been accepted as **Sociolinguistics**. But there are also some other expressions which have been used at one time or another, including ‘the sociology of language’, ‘social linguistics’, ‘institutional linguistics’,

‘anthropological linguistics’, ‘linguistic anthropology’, ‘ethno linguistics’, the ‘ethnography of communication’, etc.

The kinds of problems which are faced by the sociolinguist are: the problems of communities which develop a standard language, and the reactions of minority groups to this (as in Belgium, India, Pakistan or Wales); the problems of people who have to be educated to linguistic level where they can cope with the demands of a variety of social situations; the problems of communication which exist between nations or groups using a different language, which affects their ‘world-view’ (for example the problem of popularizing Russian among the nations which are friendly to Russia); the problems caused by linguistic change in response to social factors; the problems caused or solved by bilingualism or multilingualism [10]. By this however,



we do not mean that socio-linguistics can or does solve all such problems as stated above. Yet it can identify precisely what the problems are and provide information about the particular manifestation of a problem in a given area, so that possible solutions can thereby be found out or expedited. Furthermore, problems related to interference, code-switching or dialect-switching can be successfully handled by socio-linguistics. But the success of socio-linguistics ultimately depends upon 'pure linguistics' [6].

The scope of socio-linguistics, therefore, is the interaction of language and various sociologically definable variables such as social class, specific social situation, status and roles of speakers/hearers, etc. Socio-linguistics is not simply 'amalgam of linguistics and sociology (or indeed of linguistics and any other of the social sciences)'. It incorporates, in principle at least, every aspect of the structure and use of language that relates to its social and cultural functions. Hence there seems no real conflict between the socio-linguistics and the psycho-linguistic approach to language [9]. Both these views should be reconciled ultimately. Linguisticians like John Lyons and cognitive psychologists like Campbell advocate the necessity of widening the notion of competence to take account of a great deal of what might be called the 'social context' of speech [2; 8].

Language with its different varieties is the subject matter of socio-linguistics. Socio-linguistics studies the varied linguistic realizations of socio-cultural meanings which in a sense are both familiar and unfamiliar and the occurrence of everyday social interactions which are nevertheless relative to particular cultures, societies, social groups, speech communities, languages, dialects, varieties, styles. That is why language variation generally forms a part of socio-linguistic study.

Language can vary, not only from one individual to the next, but also from one sub-section of speech-community (family, village, town, region) to another. People of different age, sex, social classes, occupations, or cultural groups in the same community will show variations in their speech [7]. Thus language varies in geographical and social space. Variability in a social dimension is called sociolectal. According to socio-linguists, a language is code. There exist varieties within the code. And the factors that cause language variation can be summarized in the following manner:

- **Nature of participants, their relationship** (socio-economic, sexual, occupational, etc.)

- **Number of participants** (two face-to-face, one addressing a large audience, etc.)

- **Role of participants** (teacher, student, priest, parishioner, father, son, husband, wife, etc.)

- **Function of speech event** (persuasion, request for information ritual, verbal, etc.)

- **Nature of medium** (speech, writing, scripted speech, speech reinforced by gesture, etc.)

- **Genre of discourse** (scientific, experiment, sport, art, religion, etc.)

- **Physical setting** (noisy, quiet, public, private, family, formal, familiar, unfamiliar, etc.)

Language varies from region to region, class to class, profession to profession, person to person, and even situation to situation. Socio-linguistics tends to describe these variations in language with reference to their relationship with society. It shows that the relationship between language variation and society is rather a systematic relationship. It manifests that there are four major social factors involve in this variation: socio-economic status, age, gender, and ethnic background of the user or users



of language. Due to all these four factors language differs on four levels chiefly:

1. Phonological Level.
2. Lexical Level.
3. Syntax Level.
4. Discourse Level.

In other words, variation within a language with reference to its use or user can be defined in terms of 'difference of linguistic items'. So we may define a variety of language as a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution [5].

So, to describe language varieties, on one side there are linguistic items and on the other there is 'social distribution'. Let's take two different social classes for example: Middle Class and Working Class. Language of Working Class is different from that of Middle Class. The choice of vocabulary of one class is quite different from the other. Middle class uses more adjective, adverbs and impersonal pronouns. Whereas Working class uses active and simple words and here is lesser use of adjective, adverbs and impersonal pronouns. Lower class speech (restricted code) is more direct with simple grammatical construction in contrast with middle class speech (elaborated code). If a person wants to ask for the cake placed on table, person of working class may ask another person: "*shove those buns mate*". A middle class person will say the same thing in rather different way: "*Please pass the cake.*"

Every person has some differences with people around him. From eating habits to dressing, everyone has some quite unique feature. The same is the case with individual language use. Every individual have some idiosyncratic linguistic features in his or her use of language. These personal linguistic features are known as Idiolect. David Crystal in his Dictionary of Linguistics and phonetics defines Idiolect as "linguistic system of an individual – one's personal dialect" [11].

This 'linguistic system' can be described in terms of personal choice of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and individual style of pronunciation. In other words idiolect refers to a person's individual phonology, syntax and lexicon. For instance some individuals use lower pitch and some other speaks with higher pitch. Some are in habit of speaking with harder tone and it feels as if they are speaking with anger, even though they are speaking 'sweetly' on their side. Similarly, some individual's use their nasal cavity, more than their vocal cord, in their production of sound and listener feels as some sharp whistle is blowing.

In this way a person's speech is distinguished from other individuals and forms any speech community. Idiolect is a minor speech variety than sociolect, which is used by any social class. Idiolect varies with individual whereas sociolect varies with class defined on socio-economic bases. Idiolect, sociolect and dialect are the varieties which depend on their user. However, there is another scheme of language varieties distinguishing from one and another in term of their use rather than user. Register is one of them. David Crystal defines register as "a variety of language defined according to its use in a social situation" [11]. Human beings are not static. Their thinking, choice, and behavior vary according to need and situation. As they adapt their behavior according to the situation, they adapt their language. Language of individual varies from situation to situation. At some occasions people talk very formally, on some other occasions they talk technically as well as formally. At some other occasion they become informal yet technical and some times informal and non-technical. Following is the example of all these 'levels of formalities'. 'Register' as a language variety differs from dialect, sociolect and idiolect. These differences are:



Register	Dialect
Register is a language variety according to use	Dialect is language variety according to user
It may be related to any particular profession or situation	It may be related to any region or social class
It shows what the user of language is doing.	It shows who the user is.
Register is a set of particular linguistic items to be used in a particular situation	Dialect is a set of linguistic items to be used by people of particular area or class.

Up till now the different variations within a language were being dealt but there are certain situations where two or more languages are used which causes such variations that are beyond the range of one language. One of these variations is known as *pidgin*. There is a situation in which two or more languages are used with in a society. That is known as *diglossia*. *Diglossia* is not a language variety but a 'linguistic situation' where more than one language is used. In English language, term "*diglossia*" was introduced by Charles Ferguson. He used this term to refer to those societies where two very different varieties of the same language were being used. Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialect of the language (which may include standard or regional standards), there is very highly codified (often grammatically complex) superposed variety [3, p. 325–340].

In Ferguson's theory that society is '*diglossic*' where two '*divergent*' varieties of the same language are used, out of which one is 'highly codified'. Arabic speaking countries are the best examples of '*diglossia*'. Throughout the Arabic peninsula there are two varieties of Arabic language in use: Classical Arabic, and Vernaculars [3, p. 325–340].

The growth and development of linguistic science have been along rigorous scientific lines. Its tools and methods are

time-tested. With a fine scientific eye it has been able to isolate and study the units of language and formulate its principles and theories. But when the scientific linguist observed the samples of utterances in actual social reality or realities, he found variations and fluctuations for which he had no explanation in the existing corpus of knowledge. It is difficult to reconcile this fluctuation with the notion that there is a fixed set of rules which speakers follow. It is not surprising, therefore, that many conscientious linguists felt it was their duty to ignore this 'purely social' variation, and concentrate on the more rigid 'central core' of the language'[1].

On the other hand anthropologists and sociolinguists have always been interested in human verbal behavior. The impact of Ferdinand de Saussure is quite clear. He felt that 'the group constrains the individual and the group culture determines a great deal of his humanity'. Sociolinguists give equal importance to *social codes* and *linguistic codes*, and seek to discover links between the two. 'We know from daily experience that the simple model of communication between two individuals cannot represent the variety of communication situations in social life. For example, communication between family members takes the form of an intricate interplay of contact connecting pairs, triads or larger numbers and governed by an equally



intricate set of unstated understandings and expectations' [4, p. 21].

One of the major points William Labov worked to prove through his studies is that what we notice as variations in accent or sound feature or any of the several linguistic features may be a pointer that language is undergoing a change. A careful analysis might show us in which direction is the change taking place [7].

Reasons for the spread in favor of a specific feature or set of features could be many. Generally they can be described in this way.

- 1) a tendency to imitate the upper class speaker's habits;
- 2) the need to sound/appear like the majority speakers of the community;
- 3) need to be accepted by the majority and counted as one of them;
- 4) to assert one's identity and resist the majority tendencies due to particular psychological factors, i. e. dislike, bias against, etc.

In a country or speech community where different dialects are in use, growth of a 'standard' form is a matter of social acceptance and sanction. Generally, the dialect that belongs to the mightier ruling class, holding social prestige and glamour, is sought to be imitated by 'lesser' classes. William Labov has pointed out that lower-middle class show a tendency to use more 'prestige' forms in formal discourse, than does the upper-middle class. This is called *hypercorrection* which is the case of propagation of linguistic change. It is not a question of how many people speak the standard variety, but the institutional support it gets – its use in schools, media, government, administrative and army *functions*, literature, and so on [7].

A standard dialect, then 'has the highest status in a community or nation and is usually based on the speech and writing of educated native speakers of the language'. It is this variety that is taught in schools, described in dictionaries and grammars

and taught 'to non-native speakers. *Standard American English* is the standard variety, and British English is the *Standard British English*. Since what a speaker 'says on any occasion is in part a reflection of his social identity', he would like to be identified with the class or stratum that wields prestige, status and power. If he fails to do so, he runs the grave risk of being relegated to unimportance.

A linguistic variable is a set of related dialect forms all of which mean the same thing and which correlate with some social grouping in the speech community.

### Bibliography

1. Aitchison Jean Language change: progress or decay. Third edition. – Cambridge University Press, 2002. – 312 p.
2. Campbell, George L. Concise Compendium of the World's Languages. – New York: Routledge, 1995.
3. Ferguson Ch. A. Diglossia // Word. – 1959. – Vol. 15, No 4. – P. 325–340.
4. Gumperz, John J., and Jenny Cook-Gumperz. Introduction: Language and the Communication of Social Identity. In Language and Social Identity. Ed. // John J. Gumperz. – Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982. 2002. – P. 1–21.
5. Hudson R. A. Sociolinguistics. – Cambridge University Press 1980. – 250 p.
6. Jackson, Jane. The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication. (Routledge Handbooks in Applied Linguistics). London: Routledge, 2011.12
7. Labov, William. Principles of Linguistic Change Volume II: Social Factors. (Language in Society). Oxford: Blackwell, 2001.
8. Lyons J. Language and Linguistics. – Cambridge University Press, 2012. – 370 p.
9. Pride J. B., Holmes J., eds. Sociolinguistics: Selected Readings. – Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972. – P. 13.
10. Robinson W. Peter. Language in Social Worlds. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
11. Crystal David. A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. Ed. 6<sup>th</sup>. – Wiley-Blackwell, 2008. – 529 p.

© Arzhanikh T. F., Smirnova A. N., 2016